CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION WORKSHEET:
RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

Wildlife

Crane Point Vegetation Restoration

Palouse Ranger District

Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forest

Description of the Proposed Action

Proposed vegetation treatments include:

- 701 acres of commercial timber harvest (622 acres of regeneration and 79 acres of commercial thinning)
- 20 acres of Old Growth enhancement.
- 241 acres of non-commercial fuels treatment.

The following would be conducted in support of the above:

- Approximately four (4) miles of temporary roads would be constructed to facilitate vegetation treatments and would be decommissioned no later than five (5) years after the project is completed (see Figure 4).
- Road maintenance, reconstruction or improvement.
- Replace culvert on FSR 1274.

Approximately 80% of the commercial timber harvest work would be done using skyline logging systems and 20% using ground-based systems. Timber would likely be hauled via FSRs 1274 and 1273 plus their associated spur roads.

After the trees are removed for regeneration harvest, the Forest Service is required by law to reduce slash generated from harvest and to prepare sites for planting (regeneration) within three (3) years. Regeneration includes site-preparation (site-prep), reforestation of blister-rust resistant western white pine, western larch, and ponderosa pine, and animal damage control for pocket gophers, where present. Site prep could include:

- Slashing of sub-merchantable trees or brush
- Prescribed burning (broadcast burning, underburning, jackpot burning)
- Mechanical or hand piling and burning of slash
- Mastication of activity fuels, sub-merchantable trees or brush
- Biomass removal
- Non-commercial thinning of lower branches to reduce ladder fuel
- Leave tree preparation and pruning – to protect the leave trees during burning activities

Before and after planting, treatment for animal damage control by pocket gophers would occur where necessary. Pocket gopher populations increase post-harvest with a flush in vegetation such as forbs, grasses, shrubs and small trees whose roots supply a ready food source. Gophers damage young trees by

stem girdling and clipping, root pruning, and root exposure caused by burrowing, all of which can result in a failed plantation.

Non-commercial fuels treatments could include:

- Slashing of sub-merchantable trees or brush,
- Non-commercial thinning,
- Prescribed burning (broadcast burning, underburning, jackpot burning),
- Mastication of activity fuels, sub-merchantable trees or brush,
- Biomass removal, and
- Leave tree pruning.

Work would be done by hand and/or mechanical equipment, depending on slope. Objectives of the fuels treatments are to reduce stand density, influence species composition, and to reduce surface and ladder fuels in order to alter and reduce potential fire behavior. Multiple entries may be required to achieve the desired fuel reduction objectives.

The project proposes to decommission up to 1.5 miles of user-created trails in T43N, R4W, Sections 24, 26, 27, and decommission the legacy roads in Units 6 and 20. These roads are no longer needed for management and are inhibiting forest productivity.

Required Design Features

The following design features are required to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework for this resource and/or to reduce the risk of adverse impacts to this resource. A description is provided as to when, where and how the design feature should be applied and/or what conditions would trigger the need to apply the design feature.

1. WL-1 Retain trees with obvious cavities or large stick nests.

   Anticipated Effectiveness: There has been no effectiveness monitoring associated with this Design Criteria however, based on experience, effectiveness would be moderate.

2. WL-2 Maintain a minimum 40 acre yearlong no-treatment buffer (no ground disturbing activities) around recently occupied goshawk nest trees (none identified).

   Anticipated Effectiveness: Moderate, based on research and experience. (Brewer et al 2009)

3. WL-3 No ground disturbing activities shall be allowed inside known occupied goshawk post-fledgling areas from April 15 to August 15 (none identified).

   Anticipated Effectiveness: Moderate, based on research and experience. (Brewer at al 2009)

Additionally, non-wildlife associated Design Criteria have the potential added benefits related to wildlife species.

Design Criteria for Soils which limit soil disturbance, erosion, and compaction (SR 1-6) would be beneficial for Western toad by limiting sedimentation into streams and wetlands used as breeding areas as well as limiting the area impacted by heavy equipment which could reduce the potential for mortality in

upland portions of treatment units. Additionally, Souls Design Criteria which addresses retention of Coarse Woody Debris (SR-11) would benefit Western toads by providing day time refugia.

Design Criteria related to Soils and Access related to road decommissioning (SR-8) and closing gates during non-operational periods (AM-1) would be beneficial to wildlife in terms of limiting motorized access and improving security.

Cause-Effect Relationship

Vegetation management projects can influence the availability of existing and potential future nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat as well as forage availability. Additionally, vegetation management projects can reduce elk Security and Security Areas while increasing vulnerability.

Regulatory Framework

The proposed action has been reviewed and is determined to be in compliance with the management framework applicable to this resource. The laws, regulations, policies and Forest Plan direction applicable to this project and this resource are as follows:

Clearwater National Forest Plan

National Forest lands (1,350 acres) within the analysis area are all Management Area E1. Management direction for E1 ground can be found in the Clearwater National Forest Plan. The following table briefly summarize the management direction.

Management Area	NF Acres	Forest Plan Direction
E1	1,350	**Timber Producing Land** – Manage to provide optimum, sustained production of wood products and viable elk populations while providing adequate protection of soil and water quality. Prescribed fire from planned ignitions may be used to treat activity and natural fuel loadings. Manage a roaded natural setting for dispersed recreation, and manage for all levels of difficulty of ORV use on trails. (Clearwater Forest Plan, pages. III-57-59).

Forest Plan Lawsuit Stipulation of Dismissal

In February 1993, the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society representing nine co-plaintiffs filed two lawsuits against the Clearwater National Forest Plan. On September 13, 1993, the Forest Service signed a settlement with all parties and agreed to: (1) an annual timber offer not to exceed 80 million board feet per year; (2) prepare an EIS for new roads and timber sale projects which directly affect verified old-growth stands 100 acres or larger; (3) not complete any final road or timber sale decisions in areas covered by the proposed "Idaho Wilderness, Sustainable Forest and Communities Act of 1993," HR-1570; and (4) proceed only with projects, which would result in "no measurable increase" in sediment production in drainages currently not meeting Forest Plan standards. These agreements remain in effect until a Forest Plan revision is completed.

Forest Plan water quality standards are found in the Clearwater National Forest Plan on pages II-27 through II-29 and are also described in the Fish, Watershed and Soils Report for this project. The Clearwater Forest Plan was amended in 1995, following a joint decision (commonly called PACFISH) by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management for managing anadromous fish-producing watersheds on Federal lands, including the Orofino Creek drainage.

Interim direction provided by PACFISH:

- identifies and defines Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs),
- establishes Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs), and
- applies standards and guidelines to RHCA to meet the RMOs.

PACFISH default RHCA widths include those areas within 300 feet of fish bearing streams, within 150 feet of non-fish bearing streams, and within 50 feet of intermittent streams and wetlands, in non-critical habitat. PACFISH buffer widths exceed state best management practice standards.

Federal Law

Endangered Species Act

Federal agencies are required to address effects to threatened, endangered, and proposed species during project planning (Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended, P.L. 96-1591531 (c)). This document incorporates the effects on terrestrial threatened and endangered species (i.e., Biological Evaluation), per direction pertaining to streamlining (USDA Forest Service 1995a). This project is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act requires (among other things) the Forest Service to "preserve and enhance the diversity of plant and animal communities."

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, National Forest Management Act of 1976, and Forest Service regulations require federal land managers to maintain viable populations of all native and desirable non-native wildlife species with special care taken to assure that federally listed (threatened and endangered) species populations are allowed to recover. There are no federally listed threatened or endangered species using the project area.

Extraordinary Circumstances

Following are the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS:

1) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;
2) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds;
3) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas;
4) Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas;
5) Research natural areas;
6) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; and
7) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

The following conditions were necessary to consider for this resource and the following determinations are made based on a review of the proposed action, required design features, the regulatory framework, and necessary analysis **for this resource**:

- **Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species**

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

Canada Lynx

The Clearwater National Forest is considered occupied secondary lynx habitat. The Crane Point Project does not fall within a Lynx Analysis Unit and there is no modeled lynx habitat in project area. The Official Species List from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (received October 4, 2018) does not include Canada lynx. As a result the project will have no effect on Canada lynx.

Designated Critical Habitat

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

Canada Lynx Critical Habitat

There is no Designated Canada Lynx Critical habitat on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

Species Proposed for Listing

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

North American Wolverine

The Official Species List from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (received October 4, 2018) includes North American Wolverine as a Proposed Species; however, the Project Area does not retain suitable habitat conditions (persistent snow) for wolverine to be present.

Proposed Critical Habitat

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

Wildlife

The Project does not fall within any areas of Proposed Critical Habitat.

Sensitive Species

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Not necessary to consider for this project. (i.e. resource not found in the project area or no activities are proposed that affect the resource)

Wildlife

The following R1 sensitive species and their habitats are not found in the project area: Bald eagle, black-backed woodpecker, harlequin duck, pygmy nuthatch, fisher, fringed myotis, Coeur d'Alene salamander, ring-neck snake.

Extraordinary Circumstances Determination:
Will not have extraordinary circumstances associated with the proposed actions.

Wildlife

The following R1 sensitive species are found or their habitats are present in the project area: Flammulated Owl, Gray Wolf, Long-eared myotis, Long-legged myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, Western Toad.

Description of the Spatial and Temporal Bounds used for Effects Analyses

Spatial Boundary

The spatial boundary for the effects analysis is the Project Area. This area is Large enough to contain all direct and indirect effects and remain small enough to ensure effects are not diluted.

Temporal Boundary

The temporal boundary for the effects analysis is one year.

Direct/Indirect Effects

Flammulated Owl

The flammulated owl model used for this analysis includes vegetation units where the dominant tree species, in this case Ponderosa Pine and Douglas fir, with DBH's greater than 15" represent at least 40% of the unit and canopy cover falls between 40 and 60%. Based on these criteria there are approximately 12 acres of flammulated owl habitat with the Project Area located at the northwest and southwest edges of the Project Area. Flammulated owl nesting territories can range from 20 to about 60 acres. The portion of flammulated owl habitat to the northwest includes approximately 2 acres proposed for an intermediate (improvement cut) harvest. This parcel of habitat is part of a larger block (182 acres) of contiguous habitat which extends off of Forest Service managed lands. As a result there would be ample remaining habitat in that block. The remaining 10 acres is proposed for regeneration harvest and is part of a 19-acre block of contiguous habitat, half on and half off of National Forest managed lands.

Regeneration harvest of half of this block of habitat would likely render it unsuitable as a nesting territory however flammulated owls may use it for foraging.

Based on recent FIA data it is estimated that there are approximately 20,000 acres of flammulated owl habitat across the Clearwater National Forest (90% CI 8,941 – 32,813). Harvest of 12 acres of flammulated owl habitat represents less than .1% of the Forestwide flammulated owl habitat therefore the scale of the project represents a negligible impact relative to the amount of flammulated owl habitat that currently exists across the forest.

Disturbance from project activities (noise, equipment use, human presence, etc.) may temporarily displace local individuals. However, overall effects of tree removal and disturbance are limited and minor given the amount of remaining suitable habitat and short duration of disturbance.

Determination

The Crane Point Project May adversely impact individuals or habitat, but not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide.

Gray Wolf

Project straddles the Panhandle and Palouse-Hells Canyon Wolf Management Zones and falls within the "White Pine" wolf pack territory. Although no denning/rendezvous sites are known within the Project Area the Coeur d'Alene Tribe has documented denning/rendezvous sites within 3 miles of the Project Area. Road decommissioning and the removal of temporary roads within 3 years of project completion would generally improve security for wolf prey species such as elk and deer. Disturbance from project activities (noise, equipment use, human presence, etc.) may temporarily displace local individuals.

Overall effects of tree removal, temporary roads, road decommissioning, and associated disturbance are limited and minor given the resiliency of wolves related to disturbance and habitat manipulation, the amount of remaining suitable habitat, and relatively short duration of disturbance.

Determination

The Crane Point Project may adversely impact individuals or habitat, but not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide.

Fringed myotis, Long-eared myotis, Long-legged myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat

There is suitable habitat (snags/sloughing bark, rock crevices, etc.) present for these bat species in the Project Area. Roosting sites in mines, caves, rock crevices, and buildings would not be affected by any of the treatments proposed. Regeneration units would generally be devoid of snags and have few green trees making these areas largely unsuitable as habitat for roosting/maternity however may still function as foraging areas. Likewise, intermediate harvest would reduce the number of snags and live trees that could become snags over time, decreasing roosting opportunities however more open canopies may still offer foraging opportunities. Timber harvest also has the potential to injure or kill any bats that are roosting in snags and hollow trees that are felled during treatment activities. Disturbance from project activities (noise, equipment use, human presence, etc.) may temporarily displace local individuals. The effects of harvest on hibernacula, roosting sites, and maternity sites is expected to be negligible since these habitats remain well represented across the forest within RHCAs, Old Growth, recently burned forest, caves, buildings, underground mines, rock crevices, tree hollows and bridges.

Overall effects of tree removal, temporary roads, road decommissioning, and associated disturbance are limited and minor given the amount of remaining suitable habitat and short duration of disturbance.

Determination

The Crane Point Project May adversely impact individuals or habitat, but not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide.

Western Toad

Suitable breeding and upland habitat is present within project area. Wetland habitat / RHCAs would be protected. Timber harvest would remove some of the existing down wood component, daytime refugia for western toads. Though some replacement down wood would be created through harvest activity, down wood would be consumed during post-harvest fuels treatments. Design Criteria for retaining Course Woody Debris for soils would help mitigate some of the loss. Conversely, burrowing animals such as gophers may colonize areas of regeneration harvest thereby providing moist daytime microsites (refugia) for toads. Overall, any effects from the project's proposed activities to Western toad and its habitat would be limited given the availability of suitable habitat throughout the remaining project area and the short duration of disturbance.

The effects on Western toad breeding areas and upland habitat associated with the Crane Point Project are expected to be negligible at the Forest scale since breeding and upland habitats remain well represented across the forest.

Determination

The Crane Point Project may adversely impact individuals or habitat, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability on the planning area, nor cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of species viability range wide.

Management Indicator Species

Comments/concerns regarding the presence of American marten and Rocky Mountain elk security in the project area were raised during scoping. The comments are addressed here.

American Marten

Structural features such as overhead cover, large diameter coarse woody debris structure, and horizontal heterogeneity of vegetation are all extremely important to marten habitat selection (Wasserman 2008). There is no modeled American marten habitat (defined as mixed stands of Douglas fir, grand fir, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and Western red cedar with canopy cover greater than 40% and DBH greater than 10" above 4,000') within the Project Area. There have been 6 DNA hair snare sample points within approximately 2 miles of the Project Area (none within the Project Area). Of these there has been a single positive marten DNA sample approximately 0.25 miles south of the Project Area. This positive sample point is located at the head of an RHCA within a block of forested habitat which is contiguous with the Project Area yet does not meet the criteria of marten habitat.

Determination

There is no modeled habitat within the Project Area. Though there has been a single positive marten DNA sample just south of the project area there has not been any additional positive samples within 10 miles of the project area. Given this it is unlikely that implementation of the Crane Point project will result in a loss of species viability across the Forest.

Elk

Elk Security
There are no Forest Plan Standards regarding Elk Security, therefore the following analysis is qualitative in nature.

The components of Security (vegetation, topography, road density, distance from roads, block size, hunter density, seasonal timing, and landownership, etc.) are most important when considered relation to the hunting season (Lyon and Christensen 1992). Security Areas are the structural constituent of Security (Lyon and Christensen 1992) and are defined as blocks of habitat greater than 250 acres beyond .5 miles of roads (Hillis et al. 1991).

The project area straddles two Elk Management Zones (Panhandle and Palouse) and falls within Game Management Units (GMU) 5 (Panhandle Zone) and 8A (Palouse Zone). Hunting seasons vary by GMU (see Table below).

GMU	Tag Type	Archery	Any Weapon	Muzzleloader
5	A	9/6 - 9/30 9/15 - 9/21[1] 10/10 - 10-16	10/25 - 10/24 10/15 - 10/17[1]	11/20 - 12/1 12/2 - 12/8[1]
	B	9/6 - 9/12	10/10 - 10/24	12/2 - 12/8[1]
8A	A	8/30 - 9/30	8/1 - 9/15[1]	12/2 - 12/14
	B	8/30 - 9/14	10/10 - 10/24 10/15 - 10/21[2]	NA

[1]Within 1 mile of private land
[2]Private lands only excluding corporate timber lands

The majority of roads within the Crane point Project Area have a seasonal closure (10/1 – 6/14) which restricts motorized access during the firearms (rifle/muzzleloader) seasons in GMUs 5 and 8A. There are two exceptions to this; FSR 1273 and FSR 1273-D. Forest Service Road 1273 is open yearlong to all vehicles and runs through/adjacent to all/portions of regeneration harvest units 1, 2, 5, 6, 14, 19, 20, and 25. Forest Service Road 1273-D falls within a portion of the Project Area that overlaps GMU 8A which has an early firearms season (8/1-9/15) inside 1 mile of private lands. This season is in place to control elk populations impacting private lands. Forest Service Road 1273-D traverses Unit 14 for less than 0.1 miles. Reviewing topographical features (LiDAR, USGS 24K Topo) indicates that all or portions of these units will be visible from these roads post-harvesting and will lead to an increase vulnerability during the hunting season for approximately 20 years before vegetative screening re-establishes.

Buffering FSR 1273 by .5 miles yields a block of approximately 616 acres of Security Area beyond the area of the roads effect. The .5 mile buffer of FSR 1273-D is coincident with the buffer of FSR 1273. This represents approximately 46% of the Project Area. The Security Area would be reduced to approximately 358 acres post-harvest as a result of regeneration harvest and is contiguous with additional blocks of forested cover on private lands to the north.

Indications are that elk populations within GMU 5 and GMU 8A are increasing to the point that issues with agricultural depredation issues are a concern (IDFG 2014). Based on this IDFG objectives within these two GMUs have been to stabilize or decrease populations (IDFG 2017).

Determination

Motorized access and open road access or density would not change as a result of the Crane Point Project. Approximately 4 miles of temporary road would be developed however these are 1) closed to public motorized use and 2) would be decommissioned within 5 years of end of use. Additionally, 1.5 miles of user defined motorized trail as well as un-needed legacy roads within units 6 and 20 would be decommissioned. Locally, vulnerability would increase with regeneration harvest which creates openings that are visible from roads during the hunting season. This increase in vulnerability would be relatively short lived, 20 years, until vegetative screening is re-established. There would also be a concurrent decrease in security as a result of regeneration harvest eliminating Security Areas. However, elk populations within these GMUs have proven resilient as a result of high productivity (IDFG 2017) and these changes may prove beneficial in meeting Idaho Fish and Game population objectives given elk population trends and issues within these GMUs.

Cumulative Effects

Past actions in the project area, e.g. timber harvest, wildfires, fire suppression, grazing, firewood cutting, etc., have contributed to the project area's current habitat conditions. Ongoing and reasonably foreseeable actions within the proposed activity areas, e.g. recreation, road/trail maintenance, fire suppression, livestock grazing, and firewood cutting, are not expected to measurably affect suitable or potential habitat for the species analyzed in this report. When considered with past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, the Crane Point Project would have no cumulative effects on Flammulated Owl, Gray Wolf, Long-eared myotis, Long-legged myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, or Western Toad.

James Lutes, Wildlife Biologist
October 16, 2018
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References

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